

THE PRESENT PROBLEMS  
OF  
New Testament Study  
WILLIAM BANCROFT HILL

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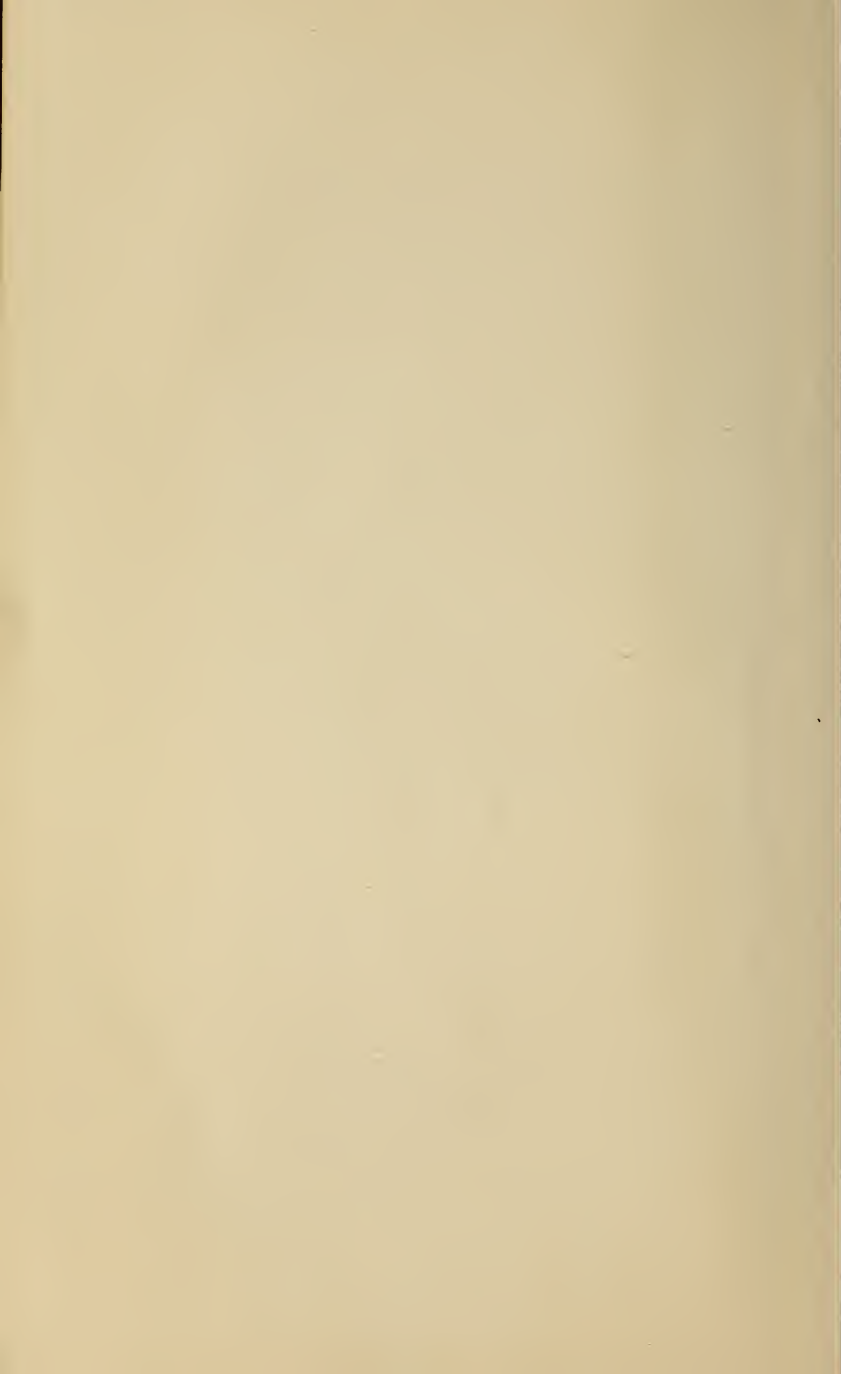
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THE PRESENT PROBLEMS OF  
NEW TESTAMENT STUDY







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OF  
*New Testament Study*

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*in*

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New York

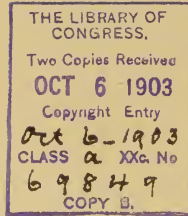
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*To  
Those who have begun with me  
The study of the problems outlined in this book  
I dedicate it  
In memory of pleasant days together*



THE purpose of this little book is single and unambitious, namely, to give with clearness a brief description of the two main fields of New Testament study, and the problems that occupy scholars in them today. Before one can read intelligently an elaborate discussion of any of those problems, he must have some general knowledge of the whole subject. This I have endeavored to put within his reach. There are many and excellent treatises on Textual Criticism and New Testament Introduction. The present book is not in any way to be classed with these, but is simply the first step to their acquaintance.

At the same time I have had in mind the wants of those who lack time or opportunity for study along these lines, and yet have a natural desire to know what topics are most prominently before New Testament scholars just now, and what opinions are held concerning them. To such the latter part of the book will probably be of special interest, but I trust they will find all of it attractive and helpful. If it gives an answer to questions which may have arisen in their minds as they read about New Testament criticism, or calms their fears as to whither that criticism tends, I shall feel that the book has not been in vain.



# New Testament Problems



## I.

BIBLE study may be either devotional or critical. In the former case the heart is the great interpreter of the sacred teachings, and the desire of the student is to find in them a guide and comfort for his daily life. That this is the most illuminating form of study, all agree. As Martin Luther said, "An old woman who reads her Bible in the chimney corner knows more about God than do the great doctors of philosophy." But critical study also is necessary if we would know what the Bible really is and teaches; there are problems in it for the scholar as well as precepts for the child. Unfortunately, — and the fact is a sad commentary upon human nature, — the word criticism, which means simply intelligent and discriminating study, suggests fault-finding and hostility. In popular thought the critics of the

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Bible are men bent upon destroying the sacredness and authority of the Book, and Biblical criticism is a thing greatly to be deplored. Whereas, it ought to be recognized that the vast majority of critics are devout and earnest men whose work is inspired by a deep love for the Word of God and a desire to know it accurately and set it forth in all its purity and power. To speak of criticism as "a menace to the Bible" is absurd, unless, forsooth, the Bible cannot bear honest and close investigation.

We sometimes hear it stated that Biblical criticism at present has turned away from the New Testament to the Old, having practically settled all important questions in the former field. Like many statements this is largely true and yet misleading. That which arouses heated discussion in Old Testament study to-day is the attempt to prove that the religion of the Hebrews, and especially what is known as the Law, does not date back in its completed form to the time of Moses, but was a gradual growth and development, whose progress may be traced from before the Exodus down to the days after the Return from Exile. It is the recognition of evolution in Hebrew religious life and literature. It involves some radical departures from familiar opinions concerning many of the Old Testament documents; and it greatly



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disturbs the minds of those who fear that the authority of the Book will be destroyed if the new views are accepted.

There was a time when New Testament study presented an equally exciting conflict between those who would carry the origin of almost all its books far down into the second century, — thus making our knowledge of Christ and the Apostolic Church extremely uncertain, — and those who defended the traditional views. But that time is no more. With the exception of here and there an erratic scholar who seeks to gain a reputation by assailing all accepted opinions, no one doubts that practically all of our New Testament books were written in the first century, within the lifetime of those who had known Christ or His immediate disciples.

Nevertheless, there are more scholars engaged to-day in critical study of the New Testament than of the Old; and the problems they are considering are of more importance to us. For while the Old Testament is closely connected with the New, the two cannot be regarded with equal interest. Judaism was not the parent but only the cradle of Christianity, — a cradle she quickly forsook. And though we may without great uneasiness hear scholars declare that Moses did not write Deuteronomy, we should be profoundly concerned if arguments of weight were brought forward to prove

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that Jesus did not speak the Sermon on the Mount. For this reason we are always interested in New Testament criticism, and eager to learn what the latest word in it may be. And while it is never easy to ascertain the consensus of current scholarship, the task is made less difficult just now by the recent completion of two great Bible dictionaries in which the leading scholars of Europe and America have given us their views.

### II.

THERE are two distinct fields of New Testament criticism, in both of which scholars are hard at work. One is the Textual or the Lower Criticism, where the endeavor is to secure a correct text, *i. e.* the exact words of the inspired authors. The work here is pursued along three different lines. First, the existing Greek manuscripts must be examined, and their different readings noted. Most of these manuscripts are too late to be of much value in determining the text; they are copies of copies down through the centuries before printing was invented. But no manuscript is absolutely worthless; and they can all be arranged in groups according to their origin (as we shall see later), and in this way be made to testify concerning

## *The Lower Criticism*

general types of variations. And by study of these variations we can get back of our earliest manuscripts, and make a pretty confident guess as to what the original text must have been. Second, there are certain versions, *i. e.* translations, which were made before any of the existing manuscripts. The translator must, therefore, have used an earlier manuscript than any we now possess; and by studying his version carefully we may discover what the text of that manuscript was. Of course, there is a twofold difficulty in doing this:—the document which gives us the version is not an original one, and may contain the mistakes of a copyist, and we are not always sure what words to use when we undertake to translate the version back once more into Greek. Still, the versions are a most important help in determining the original Greek. Third, there are the writings of the Ante-Nicene Church Fathers, which are full of quotations from the New Testament also taken from an earlier text than any now at hand. By a study of these quotations we may discover what that text must have been. But the same possibility of changes by later copyists confronts us; and there is the further difficulty that we are never sure the Father himself was accurate in his quotations. He may have given the exact words of a Scripture passage, or he may have been content

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to give the sense of it in his own words. Thus we have three sources from which to gain the original text. And while none of them is so infallible that we can afford to disregard the other two, yet if all three agree substantially, we can accept their testimony with confidence.

### III.

THE other field is the Higher Criticism. It is given that name because it presupposes and is based upon the Lower Criticism; but the term is unfortunate since it seems to imply superiority and patronage. When to the obnoxious word, criticism, we join the likewise irritating adjective, higher, we cannot wonder that the very name, Higher Criticism, awakens hostility in the minds of those who do not exactly understand what it means. But higher criticism is a most innocent and profitable pursuit, and is what each student is always urged to undertake if he would make himself an intelligent Bible scholar. In beginning the study of any book of the New Testament certain questions present themselves. First, there is the question of Integrity. Is the book a unit, or is it made up of independent parts which were put together later on? For example, John 7:53

## *The Higher Criticism*

— 8: 11, — the story of the woman taken in adultery, — is evidently not by the same writer as the rest of the Gospel: the style, the vocabulary, and the fact that in different manuscripts it is found inserted in different places, indicate this. That it is a true story we are ready to agree, but certainly it is not an integral part of the Fourth Gospel. Next, there is the question of Authorship. Some books bear an author's name, — are they genuine or forgeries? The discussion as to whether Paul was the author of the Pastoral Epistles would come under this head. Other books, *e. g.* the Four Gospels and Acts, are anonymous. Shall we accept the authorship which tradition has assigned, or may that be a mistake? Then there is the question of Date, — when was the book written? And of Place, — where was it written? And of Purpose, — under what circumstances and for what object was it written? All these questions bear strongly upon the most important of all, — the question of Credibility. Is the book reliable? Can we accept its statements as those of an honest, intelligent, unbiased person who had opportunity to know the truth of what he writes? This is often called the question of Authenticity; but the term has unfortunately been confounded with genuineness, and so should be avoided as ambiguous. There are still further questions as to the Literary Form of the

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book. Is it poetry or prose? — history or fiction? — prophecy or apocalypse? — a letter in which the writer has in mind a special recipient, or an epistle intended for any who may care to read it? We must reach a conclusion about these matters before we can understand the book. To interpret the Revelation of John as if it were the same form of literature as the Gospel of John, or to treat the Epistle of James like Paul's letter to the Philippians, may lead us into serious mistakes.

Now all these questions belong to the field of the Higher Criticism. Here the task is to take the text furnished by the Lower Criticism, and from a careful study of it, under whatever light may be thrown upon it by history, determine, if possible, the integrity, the authorship, the date, the purpose, and the credibility of each book. This work is indispensable if we are to give the book our full and intelligent confidence. It is a more interesting work than that of the Lower Criticism, except to some few minds so constituted as to find keen delight in poring over crabbed manuscripts, and tracing their minute agreements and dissimilarities. But it is also a work in which there is more room for indulging personal prejudices, or framing novel theories. And because some of the higher critics have done this, the study has at times been brought into disrepute. In a land like Germany

## *The New Testament Text*

where competition among scholars is most keen, and the ambitious student has little chance to draw attention to himself and secure a coveted professorship unless he can set forth novel ideas and advocate them with ingenuity, a premium is put upon erratic scholarship; and much harm has resulted. The field of Bible study there is strewn with exploded theories; and for sober, well-balanced work we look more to England and America. But there are signs of a reaction in Germany to-day, and of increasing honor to the scholars whose aim is to instruct rather than to startle.

### IV.

THESE, then, are the two fields in which scholars are working. The question of interest to us is, What are they doing in them? What are the problems that receive special attention, and what solutions of them meet with most favor? We will begin with the Lower Criticism.

When Westcott & Hort in 1881 published their Greek New Testament, in the preparation of which they had been engaged twenty-eight years, it was generally accepted as giving a final, authoritative text, which nothing could disturb except, perhaps, the discovery of still more ancient manuscripts.



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And, in fact, the editors confidently declared, "It would be an illusion to anticipate important changes of text from any acquisition of new documents." Their statement may be accepted; and yet, there is a growing disposition to regard their work as not quite so final as they supposed. No new text to take its place may for the present be given us, though scholars are at work upon such a one; but we cannot be quite as confident as formerly that we have practically the original text of the New Testament. How this has come about, let us see.

The manuscripts of the New Testament are overwhelming in number. The earlier ones are called uncials, because written in separated, capital letters; and of these there are more than a hundred, though the majority of them are mere fragments. The later manuscripts are called either minuscules, because written in smaller letters, or cursives, because the letters are joined in a running hand. Of these there are more than two thousand; and if we add to them the lectionaries, which were Scripture lessons arranged to be read during the church year, we have about three thousand. A single manuscript containing all the New Testament, would be of inconvenient size, except, perhaps, for pulpit use; so the books were usually arranged in four collections, — the Gospels, Acts and the Catholic Epistles, the Pauline Epistles, and the



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Apocalypse. Of these collections we have preserved in greatest numbers the Gospels, and in least, the Apocalypse. To examine all the manuscripts and note their readings would be impossible; and most of the later ones are not worth the labor. Yet the mere question of age does not determine value. A late manuscript may be an accurate copy of a very early one now lost, and thus be almost as valuable as the early one itself; or an early manuscript, — one of the uncials, — may be full of blunders by some careless scribe, and thus be an untrustworthy document.

It would seem at first sight, therefore, an almost hopeless task to distinguish among manuscripts, and determine which ones to follow. But Westcott & Hort simplified the problem greatly by placing them in four groups according to their probable origin. The genealogy of the New Testament manuscripts, if we look at their history, might be compared to that of a human family. The original text, which we are so eager to discover, would be the common ancestor, — the great forefather of all. The sources of the four groups would be four sons, each closely resembling but not exactly like the father. The present multitude of manuscripts would be the descendants of these four sons, bearing a strong family resemblance, but having individual peculiarities, and occasionally by inter-

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marriage with members of the other families reproducing their characteristics. The task of the critic, accordingly, is first by a study of the common features of each group to determine the character of its primitive source, and then to decide which one of the four sources was probably most like the original text, and should be used as the best authority in recovering that text. The manner in which this is done is full of technical details; the results are all we are now concerned to know.

When Erasmus, just before the Reformation, prepared the Greek text which was practically the one used for the King James version of the New Testament, the manuscripts he studied all belonged to one group which Westcott & Hort call the Syrian, from the probable place of its origin. The group is a very large one, and includes the great majority of existing manuscripts. Though the text of this group originated as early as the fourth century, it bears evident marks of being a deliberate revision. Changes have been introduced to improve the style or remove difficulties which might puzzle the reader; and the general attempt of the authors was to give a smooth and attractive text "more fitted for cursory perusal or recitation than for repeated and diligent study." This fact, rather than simply the fact that the

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manuscripts used by Erasmus were few and late, justified the preparation of the Revised Version to take the place of the King James, as giving more nearly the original words of the New Testament writers.

The second group, called the Alexandrian, is small and likewise a literary revision; it is of no great importance, and we need not stop to consider it. The third group is the one which Westcott & Hort considered the most authoritative, and on which they relied mainly for their text. They called it the Neutral group because they supposed it to have been less altered from the original text than any of the other three. Two famous manuscripts belong to this group, both written in the fourth century, and older than any others we possess except some small fragments. One is the Codex Sinaiticus, discovered by Tischendorf in 1859 at the convent of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai, and now in the Imperial Library at St. Petersburg. It contains the New Testament complete. The other is the Codex Vaticanus, so called because it is in the Vatican Library at Rome. It lacks the Epistle to the Hebrews after 9:14, the Pastoral Epistles, Philemon and the Apocalypse. Westcott & Hort believed that though the texts of these two manuscripts had a common ancestor, they descended from it along separate lines, and so in

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their agreement furnish strong evidence concerning a very early text. Accordingly they made these two manuscripts, especially the Vatican, the chief authority for their text, which is to a great extent the one followed in our Revised Version. But all scholars are not so sure that the two manuscripts are thus independent of each other. It may be that one was copied from an immediate ancestor of the other or even directly from the other itself, in which case their agreements would be of little value toward determining the original text.

There remains the fourth group, which has long borne the name of Western because its existing manuscripts were mainly written in the Western parts of Europe and Africa; but there is evidence that the text they represent was current in the East as well as the West. The most famous manuscript of this group is the Codex Bezaë, so called because it was given by Beza in 1581 to the University of Cambridge, which still owns it. It dates from the sixth century, and contains only the Gospels and Acts with a Latin version of them on each opposite page. It differs so remarkably from the majority of manuscripts that Beza thought it ought never to be published. For example, after Luke 6:4 there is inserted the following story of Christ, — “*On the same day having seen one work-*

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*ing on the Sabbath, He said unto him, O man, if indeed thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed; but if thou knowest not, thou art accursed, and art a transgressor of the law."* This, as Dean Farrar points out, is too striking and intrinsically probable to be lightly rejected; it represents the spirit of Christ's teachings as understood by Paul, — whatever is not of faith is sin. Again, after Matt. 20:28 we have this addition to Christ's words about serving, — "*But ye seek from little to increase, and from greater to be less.*" This reminds us of James 1:9, — "Let the brother of low degree glory in his high estate, and the rich in that he is made low." Still again, after Acts 11:27, in which we are told that there came down prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch, the Codex Bezae reads, "*And there was much gladness. And when we were assembled, one of them, named Agabus, spake and signified*" etc. If this reading could be accepted, the passage would be the first of the famous "we" sections in Acts, and would indicate that the writer was a member of the church in Antioch. Most of the readings peculiar to this manuscript are not as important as these, but are minor additions to the text, — little comments, explanations, and the like. There are also noteworthy omissions, for example in the last chapter of Luke, where the marginal notes of our Revised

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Version indicate them. If the Codex Bezaë stood alone, we might regard it as simply a curiosity, showing the free way in which some copyist treated the usual text. But it is the oldest of a small but distinct group, the members of which all exhibit the same freedom in altering the text, though in doing so they by no means agree with one another. Their disagreements with one another are so marked that, as Kenyon says, "it is doubtful whether they can be referred to a single ancestor rather than to a tendency to laxity in transcription manifested in different places" (Criticism of the N. T. 59).

Though the Western group of manuscripts was largely disregarded by Westcott & Hort, it has recently received more attention and favor; and the question of its origin and value is perhaps the chief problem in textual criticism to-day. The reason for this is the testimony of the versions and of the Fathers. The earliest translations of the New Testament were into Latin and Syriac, sometime in the second century. We know that before the time of Jerome there had been several Latin translations, and that it was the disagreements in them which caused him in 383 A. D. to begin the publication of his famous revision, the Vulgate, which henceforth became the accepted Latin text. Now these Old Latin versions, so far as we can determine from what remains of them and from

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quotations in the Latin Fathers, were all of the Western form of text. This would indicate that in the Western group we have a very early text. The same fact is shown by the Syriac versions, though the evidence has only recently been made certain. The standard Syriac translation, extolled as "the queen of versions," is the Peshitta, which was generally used as early as the fifth century, and presents the Syrian form of text. Some scholars maintained that, like the Vulgate, it was a revision of earlier versions; but there was no proof of this until in 1842 a part of a copy of the Gospels was discovered giving a different text. This manuscript, which is called the Curetonian from the scholar who edited it, was thought to give an earlier version, though some regarded it as merely a corruption of the Peshitta. In 1892 Mrs. Lewis discovered, in that convent on Mt. Sinai where so many treasures have been found, a Syriac palimpsest manuscript of the Gospels whose version is accepted as earlier than that of the Peshitta and possibly earlier than that of the Curetonian. It belongs, as does the Curetonian, to the Western group, and thus is a new proof that the group gives us a very early text. Like other members of this group it has its peculiar readings. Thus in Matt. 27:17 Pilate gives the people their choice between *Jesus* Barabbas and



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Jesus who is called the Christ. In John 11:39 Martha objects, "*Why are they taking away the stone?*" The most important variations are in the first chapter of Matthew, where in v. 16, it reads, "*Jacob begat Joseph; Joseph (to whom was espoused the Virgin Mary) begat Jesus who is called the Christ,*" and in v. 21, "*She shall bear thee a son,*" and in v. 25, "*She bare him a son and he called His name, Jesus.*" Yet at the same time we find unchanged the other statements in the chapter which set forth the supernatural conception of Jesus. These variations have aroused much discussion in present theological debates concerning the virgin birth of Christ. The evident inconsistency of the text shows that it is in process of alteration. Those who deny the virgin birth say that the alterations were made in the interest of orthodoxy, *i. e.* the original text represented Jesus as the son of Joseph, and the statements about the supernatural conception were later additions. But it is simpler to suppose that the reverse was the case, and that the changes were made under the influence of some such early heresy as the one which taught that Jesus was only a man until the Holy Ghost descended upon Him at baptism. It is remarkable in either case that such evident contradictions should be retained; we should have expected the reviser to make all the statements



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harmonious. Possibly he considered they were harmonious; if so, we must regard his words about Joseph's fatherhood as similar to those in Luke 2:41, 48.

With such support from the Fathers and the earliest versions the Western group cannot be lightly set aside in our search for the original text. Dr. Kenyon declares, "It is not too much to say that all the earliest writers who quote the New Testament sufficiently to enable us to discover what type of text they used, must have used manuscripts of this character; and they are not confined to any single country." And Dr. Hort, though he does not consider the Codex Bezae a good authority, admits that it "presents a truer image of the form in which the Gospels and Acts were most widely read in the third and probably a great part of the second century, than any other extant Greek manuscript."

What then is the conclusion? Evidently this, — that in the second century there was no general uniformity among the manuscripts. If most of them were of the Western group, they did not agree even with one another; for disagreement is a characteristic of that group. Indeed, one German scholar, Blass, maintains that disagreements go back to the very autographs; and that Luke, for example, prepared two copies of Acts, the first a

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rough draft, to which the Codex Bezae corresponds, and the second a corrected and less prolix copy, — the one he sent to Theophilus, — represented by the Codex Vaticanus. This opinion has not gained acceptance, though some of the statements peculiar to the Codex Bezae do seem to be those of an eyewitness. Undoubtedly in the early days of the church no special endeavor was made to secure accurate copies of the New Testament books. The need was not felt. Christians were expecting the return of their Lord at any time, and their thoughts were turned to the future rather than to the past. The copying was done by men of no great scholarship, who had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to compare manuscripts and thus correct errors. The most carefully prepared manuscripts would be those intended for use in the churches; but these were the ones most easily discovered and destroyed in any time of persecution. Really the marvel is that the early manuscripts were as accurate as they seem to have been.

There was one place where conditions were more favorable, and that was Alexandria. This city, which long was preëminent as a centre of learning, had at the end of the second century a flourishing Christian school of theology presided over by Clement and afterwards by Origen. Here, if anywhere, there would be men with the ability and opportunity

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to secure a correct text, and with the inclination to do so. There is reason to connect the Neutral text with Alexandria, and to believe that it represents the best text that could be secured at the end of the second century. But to go further and declare that it gives us exactly the original text, seems unwarranted by the facts. And while we never can predict what may not be brought out from the timeless sands of Egypt, there is little hope of ever securing that original text. There was no reason why the autograph manuscripts should be carefully preserved, for no special sanctity attached to them; and being of papyrus they would soon wear out or crumble if not treated with special care. Moreover, if we actually had an autograph manuscript, we could not be sure that no slips of the hasty pen of the writer had taken place to mar its accuracy. A perfect text must remain the dream of the scholar or the delusion of the ignorant.

When we thus abandon the hope of securing a perfect text, and especially when we learn that the number of variations in existing manuscripts is roughly reckoned to be 200,000, we are tempted to despair of knowing what the original contents of the New Testament were. But this is a needless alarm. The vast amount of variations arises from the great number of existing manuscripts. If, as is the case with many of the classics and practically

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with the Old Testament, we had to depend upon one late manuscript, there would be no variations to disturb us; but on the other hand there would be no way except pure conjecture to determine whether we had a correct text. The cause of our trouble is also the remedy for it. Then, too, the magnitude of the number of variations is deceptive, because it is reached by taking some one manuscript as a standard and counting each variation from this as many times as there are other manuscripts in which it appears. Every new manuscript, therefore, though it may give no new variations, increases the number. And especially we must bear in mind the fact that only "a very small proportion of the variations materially affects the sense, a much smaller proportion is really important, and no variation affects an article of faith or a moral precept" (Vincent). This was finely illustrated by the Revised Version. When it first appeared, some persons who were not inclined to accept the teachings of the King James version hastened to examine it, hoping to find matters more to their taste. But though there was scarcely a verse that did not show some slight change, and though a few passages had been wholly omitted, it was the same New Testament after all. We had lost the angel troubling the pool of Bethesda, and we were not sorry to lose him. We had to give up I. John 5:7

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as a proof-text for the doctrine of the Trinity, — and a very convenient text it was, too; but there remained texts in abundance that could be used in support of the doctrine. There was only one thing that had to be hopelessly abandoned, namely, any interpretation of Scripture which hinges upon the precise form of a particular word, finding deepest significance in the use of an aorist instead of an imperfect tense, and in the presence or absence of the Greek article. This kind of exegesis, at least in its extreme form, is no longer possible; and I think we all feel that its passing is not to be deplored.

### V.

IN connection with omissions in the revised text, it is worth while to notice the closing verses of the Gospel of Mark. Scholars have long doubted whether the last twelve verses of that Gospel were a part of the original text. The oldest manuscripts, — the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus, — break off abruptly with the words, “for they were afraid” (Mark 12:8); and so does the Syriac palimpsest discovered by Mrs. Lewis. Most of the existing manuscripts, however, have the ending with which we are familiar; so the Revised Version has retained it, with a

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marginal note calling attention to its doubtful genuineness. A few manuscripts have another and much shorter ending, about as follows, — “*And they reported briefly to Peter and those in his company all the things commanded. After these things Jesus Himself also sent forth through them from the East even to the West the holy and incorruptible message of eternal salvation.*” That neither of these endings was the original one, is now generally agreed. Both of them seem to be later compositions added to complete what would otherwise be an unfinished book. Why the book was thus imperfect, we can only surmise. One conjecture is that some interruption, possibly even his death, prevented Mark from completing his work; and so it was sent forth in the state he left it. But this seems hardly probable, especially since the book was so nearly completed. Another conjecture is that the original ending contained matters not acceptable to the church later on; and so it was removed and a substitute put in its place. But why is all trace of the original ending lost, and why have some manuscripts no ending at all? It seems more likely that an early manuscript, which had become the only one, was by hard usage or accident mutilated, and thus the original ending was hopelessly lost. We know that Mark was less read and prized by the early church, because it

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was shorter than Matthew and Luke, and contained practically nothing which could not be found in them. A Christian who could afford to have but one Gospel would prefer a larger one that gave the sayings as well as the deeds of his Master; and if in the stress of persecution he was called upon to surrender his sacred books, he would more willingly part with Mark than with another Gospel. It is not impossible, therefore, that the book did come so near totally disappearing that one leaf actually was forever lost. But this is only conjecture. The ending with which we are familiar, the longer one, bears indications of having been composed by some one who drew his facts from the other Gospels but fashioned their statement under the influence of post-apostolic ideas. The words attributed to Christ, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," though they join belief and baptism according to apostolic practice, apparently put baptism on an equality with belief as indispensable for salvation, and thus show the incipient stage of that later emphasis of the sacrament which ascribed to it a magical virtue. And the signs that shall accompany them that believe, — "In my name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands



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on the sick, and they shall recover," — these signs not only seem to be a reminiscence of certain apostolic miracles (Paul and the viper, for example), but also show the tendency, which later on became strong, to regard miracles as mere marvels, — wonders with no spiritual content. They have often been pointed to by men who professed to work miracles, and would have us simply for that reason accept their claims to be messengers from God. I am glad that the verses can be set aside as spurious; and I regret that they were not omitted from the Revised Version. But who wrote them? This question, which seems a hopeless one, unexpectedly received a possible answer when Conybeare in 1891 found an Armenian manuscript of the Gospels, written 986 A. D., in which these twelve verses of Mark are separated from the rest by a space and some flourishes, and bear the heading, "*Of the presbyter Ariston.*" There was an Aristion who is mentioned along with a presbyter John by Papias, a writer of the second century, as one of the persons from whom he gained information about the Lord. The presbyter John is the person often advocated as the author of the Fourth Gospel by scholars who deny the authorship of the Apostle John. And though we may not be willing to agree with them on that point, it is easier to allow that Aristion may have been the



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writer who in the early part of the second century prepared the longer ending of the Gospel of Mark. The shorter ending seems to have originated even later, and to be a very modest attempt to give the book a proper conclusion.

### VI.

WHILE recent explorations have not given us any important manuscript of the Greek New Testament, a flood of light has been cast upon the language of the New Testament by the unearthing in Egypt of a great mass of papyrus documents of the first century. Hitherto there has been much dispute about that language. One theory regarded it as a kind of sacred language based upon the Greek in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. Another theory explained it as the language of Jews who, having learned Greek in manhood, still did their thinking in Aramaic, and wrote Greek much as men spoke French “after the scole of Stratford atte Bowe.” A third theory maintained that it was simply the common Greek of the first century, — the every-day language of the Greek-using people around the Mediterranean. This third theory was not easy to prove or disprove, because little remained to show what was the common

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Greek of that day. There were plenty of inscriptions; but the language put upon a monument is generally not that of ordinary speech. There were also books of that age; but who could say whether the writers were using the vernacular or were imitating the Athenian classics which were held up as models of literary style? These recent finds in Egypt have given us quantities of material from which to ascertain the common Greek. Here are not only census reports, receipts, wills and such official documents, but also family letters and business correspondence and the like, in which men write exactly as they speak. An examination of these papyri reveals the interesting fact that the Greek of the first century was practically the same in all the lands where it was spoken. Dialectic differences had disappeared as fully as they have in English-speaking lands to-day. St. Paul could preach in the common Greek anywhere around the Mediterranean, and be readily understood. And what is still more interesting, we learn that Paul and the others in their writings used this common Greek in the ordinary fashion. Words and phrases and constructions that had been supposed to be peculiar to the New Testament are found repeatedly in these papyri, and are evidently of the vernacular. The Apostles wrote as they spoke, and they spoke exactly as other men

## *The New Testament Language*

of their day. And this fact, by the way, seems to settle the question as to whether Palestine was a bilingual country; for how could these men have used the common Greek so naturally unless they learned it in childhood along with Aramaic? Deissmann and others are exploring the great field thus recently opened; and their labors must bear much fruit, not only in the grammar and lexicography of the New Testament, but even in its theology. If terms which we supposed to be technical and purely theological, are found to be also colloquial, they must be interpreted in the light of their ordinary use. The sacred writers may have put new meaning into them, but the ordinary meaning forms the starting-point for any interpretation of them. The Epistles become much more simple and natural letters when we learn that their authors wrote in the customary fashion of their time. As Dr. Moulton remarks, "It gives us a curious sensation to find in letters from heathens to heathens Pauline and Johannine phrases in which we should never have imagined that the apostle was merely galvanizing into life an old formula. 'I salute all the friends by name.' 'I make my prayer for you daily before the Lord Serapis,' 'making mention of you before the gods,' 'day and night I make supplication to the god on your behalf,' 'before all things I pray that

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you may be in health,' — these and other phrases in papyrus letters give a curious new light when we look into the Epistles of the New Testament, and find their analogues there" (*Biblical World*, March, 1902). To take this new light and use it in the interpretation of the Epistles is one work which lies before the scholars of to-day.

### VII.

AFTER this brief survey of the Lower or Textual Criticism we turn to the companion field of the Higher Criticism. The problems here are more numerous and complex, and all we can do is briefly to point out some of them, — following the order of the books, — and indicate what the scholars are doing with them.

The Gospels are the most important of all the New Testament writings; and the amount of study that is being spent upon them, and the multitude of books appearing upon various topics connected with them, can hardly be realized by one whose attention has not been specially turned in this direction. The life of Christ still remains the greatest subject for Christian study; and though excellent books have been written upon it, the one that shall fully satisfy our desires has not yet

## *The Life and Words of Christ*

appeared. It is easy to lay down the qualifications its writer must possess, — profound scholarship, freedom from prejudice and theorizing, a clear and attractive literary style, and above all such sympathy both with the Master and with Christian thought as shall enable him to enter into the heart of his subject and set it forth with spiritual power. But who is sufficient for these things? Personally I am waiting with much expectation the *Life of Christ* promised by Dr. Sanday. His previous work along various lines of New Testament study, and especially his article on Jesus Christ in *Hastings' Bible Dictionary*, justify the hope that his book will be a classic.

The most popular topic at the present hour is the teachings of Christ. This is being studied from every possible point of view in Germany, England, and America, and books upon it multiply with bewildering rapidity. Critical thought in very recent years has passed on from the question, What manner of man was Jesus? to the companion question, What were the truths He taught? And, though the fact seems surprising, this is largely a new question. The situation in regard to the teachings of Christ is now much the same as was the situation in regard to His life two generations ago. Men then were just beginning to realize that though they were familiar with the story of

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the Gospels, no careful interpretation of that story, and no critical history of the life of Christ in the light of His surroundings and opportunities had been undertaken. In like manner we are rousing to the fact that, though we have long been familiar with the words of Christ and have held them unspeakably precious, they have not been given the patient, comprehensive, scholarly study they deserve. Our theology has been based upon Paul, not upon his Master; and we have hardly attempted to set forth in systematic form the teachings of Christ, and draw the conclusions that would crown such an attempt. Now at last we have awakened to the importance of the work; and beyond question its results will be most valuable for Christian thought and life.

### VIII.

A MOST intricate yet fascinating question is the origin of our four Gospels. The first three, — the Synoptics, — present one problem; the fourth presents another and quite different one. The Synoptic Problem is this: — Why is it that these three books are so remarkably alike, telling the same story (which is with all its details only a small part of Christ's public ministry) in the same manner and often in the same words, — and yet

## *The Synoptic Problem*

are so full of variations from one another? In some way the books must be connected in their origin, but how? It is not a new problem. St. Augustine recognized it and attempted a solution of it; but it still calls forth the study of a host of scholars. Various solutions are proposed. The one which satisfied St. Augustine is that of mutual dependence, *viz.* after the first Gospel (whichever that may have been) was written, the author of the second copied it more or less accurately with such omissions or additions as seemed advisable, and the author of the third made similar use of one or both of the other two. Another solution is that there was an original document (perhaps more than one) now lost, which was used by all three evangelists as the basis of their work. A third is that the gospel story had been told orally so often before it was written down that it had assumed a stereotyped form, and this form gave rise to the resemblances in our three Gospels. Without discussing any of these we may notice more in detail the "two-document" theory which is just now most popular. It is based upon statements of Papias, who wrote not long before the middle of the second century, and who is quoted by Eusebius in his great book on church history. Papias said that "*Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not indeed*



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*in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things said or done by Christ,"* and that "*Matthew wrote the Logia in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted [or translated] them as best he could.*" According to this statement Mark's book would be the story of Christ's life as Peter used to tell it for evangelistic purposes, — a story, therefore, in which the longer and deeper discourses of Christ would be omitted, as not suited to a popular audience, and emphasis would be placed upon the deeds and the brief but striking sayings of Jesus, while a large place would be given to the closing scenes of His life. It would be very much such a book as our Gospel of Mark, though in its original form it may not have been altogether identical with that Gospel. The word "*Logia*" may be translated in various ways, but its most probable meaning is oracles or sayings. We can readily believe that Matthew, who from his training would be the ready penman of the Twelve, wrote down in Aramaic, — the language in which they were spoken, — the sayings and discourses of Jesus, either with or without brief introductions telling the circumstances under which they were uttered. These two books, according to the "two-document" theory, were the sources of the Synoptic Gospels. Our Gospel of Mark is practically that story told by Peter and written out by Mark after Peter's death.



## *The Synoptic Problem*

Luke, if he was the author of our third Gospel, took the book of Mark and the Logia, along with other documents or information which he had collected, and wove them together after the manner of a careful historian, endeavoring to place the sayings of Jesus in their original connection with His deeds. The preface to his book casts light upon the character of his work. About the same time some unknown writer also took Mark's book, which with some literary improvements and changes in its order he used almost in its entirety, and the Logia, which he preferred to insert in large sections instead of following Luke's plan of breaking it up; and with these and some other material he composed our first Gospel. It bears the name of Matthew, because it was considered to be a reproduction and enlargement of Matthew's Logia. Thus we have our three Gospels; and the date of their composition is put by nearly universal agreement somewhere between 60 A. D. and 100 A. D. This theory does not solve all the difficulties of the Synoptic Problem, and various modifications of it are accordingly proposed; but its general features have gained much acceptance. One result is that Mark must be considered to be the earliest of our Gospels, and the one in which we get back most nearly to the story of Jesus as the Apostles used to tell it on their preaching tours. Mark, therefore, is

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studied with far more interest than in former days when it was supposed to be simply an abridgment of Matthew. Another result is that scholars are most eager to ascertain the original form of the Logia, — that precious note-book of Jesus' sayings. Their endeavor, of course, is to reconstruct it from the two Gospels in which it was incorporated; but possibly some manuscript may yet be found giving it independently. A little papyrus leaf of sayings of Jesus was discovered in Egypt in 1896, and was evidently part of a book (the page was numbered) which may have been some such collection of Logia. Who knows what the next turn of the spade may disclose!

### IX.

THE problem presented by the fourth Gospel, — the Johannine Problem, — is almost the exact opposite of the one we have been considering. It is this, Why is this Gospel so unlike the other three? There are evident differences in regard to the apparent length of Christ's public ministry, the time when it began, the place in which it was mainly carried on, the measure of favor it met with, and the characters who were prominent in it. The explanation of these is not difficult if, — as tradition agrees, — John was written after the other Gospels,

## *The Johannine Problem*

and as a supplement to them. There was no reason why the story already told should be repeated; and any Harmony of the Gospels shows how readily John's story can be made to fit in with that of the Synoptics. The really difficult part of the problem is this, — Why are the person and teachings of Christ in John so unlike what we have in the other Gospels? Notice some of the differences:

In the Synoptics Jesus is reticent concerning His divinity, — He will not allow even the demoniacs to declare Him the Son of God, and His own favorite title is *The Son of Man*; in John He emphasizes His divinity continually, — even the Baptist bears witness that He is the Son of God, and His own favorite title is *The Son to whom God is The Father*.

In the Synoptics He does not announce His Messiahship until the latter part of His ministry, and rejoices when His disciples at length discover it; in John it is publicly proclaimed by Himself and others from the very outset of His ministry.

In the Synoptics the great theme of His preaching is the Kingdom of God; in John, except in the conversation with Nicodemus, it is never mentioned.

In the Synoptics He teaches repeatedly by parables; in John there are no parables, — only a few allegories.

## *New Testament Problems*

In the Synoptics His words are brief, pregnant sayings, or groups of sayings loosely connected, as in the Sermon on the Mount; in John there are long and elaborated discourses on definite themes, *e. g.* the Bread of Life and the Coming of the Comforter.

The style of His utterances in John is unlike that in the Synoptics, and the keywords, — “light, darkness, life, death, the world, witness, love” etc., are new; but both style and keywords are the same as those of John himself as shown in the Epistle. In fact it is not easy to distinguish in the Gospel the words of Christ from the words of John, so that commentators are still uncertain whether such a saying as John 3:16, — “God so loved the world” etc., — should be assigned to Jesus or to the evangelist.

These and similar features make many scholars dubious about the Fourth Gospel. They are not so ready as formerly to pronounce it a late and worthless fabrication. All but the most extreme critics put its date at the latest not much beyond 100 A. D., and ascribe its authorship, if not to John himself, to one of his immediate disciples who gained his information from the Apostle. But how to explain its difference from the Synoptics, especially in regard to the teachings and self-proclamation of Christ, remains a serious problem.

## *The Johannine Problem*

That the work in Judea was unlike that in Galilee is not a sufficient explanation, for according to John Christ taught in the synagogue at Capernaum exactly the same as He did in Jerusalem. The most common solution of the problem is that John's picture of Jesus stands to the picture in the Synoptics as a masterly portrait does to a photograph. John was the youngest of the Twelve, the one whom Jesus cherished as a younger brother, and who entered most sympathetically into His thought. The Gospel was the work of his old age after years of Christian experience and meditation had made increasingly clear to him the meaning of Christ's words and deeds. It was written to meet the growing discussions concerning the real nature of Christ; and its definite purpose, indicated in the prologue, is expressly stated in the close of the book, — "Many other signs, therefore, did Jesus in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye may have life in His name" (20:30-31). We have, it has well been said, in the Synoptics a picture of Jesus as the world saw Him, but in John a picture of Jesus as the world might have seen Him had men been in heart and life prepared to see. The evangelist evidently gives us the teachings of Jesus in his

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own style and words. He has aimed to act as an interpreter rather than simply as a reporter. How far his interpretation is correct remains a matter of dispute in which personal prejudice has far too much to do with conclusions. I notice that many of the recent books on the teachings of Jesus confine themselves to material found in the Synoptics, ignoring John. This may be simply from the desire to avoid disputed ground, or it may be from the belief that the teachings in John are not genuine. But Wendt in his great work on the subject devotes much space to showing that the teachings of Jesus, though their form may differ, are really the same in substance in all four Gospels; and his conclusion concerning the record in John is that it was given by "a disciple of Jesus who was more deeply penetrated than the rest with the original spirit and the inward form of the teachings of his Master." Such testimony is valuable; but after all, the strongest proof that the Christ of the first three Gospels is the same as the Christ of John, is the indisputable fact that the heart and thought of the Christian Church throughout the centuries have never been conscious of any difference, save that in John there is found a fuller revelation of the divine side of the Godman.

## *The Book of Acts*

### X.

ACTS is a book whose credibility will always be assailed by two classes of critics, — those who reject miracles and must, therefore, explain away any record of them, and those who hold theories concerning the origin of the Christian Church that do not agree with the statements in this first book of church history. All such are bound to maintain that Acts is a late production which, though it may incorporate documents of value, as, for example, the travel diary of Luke, gives a distorted, legendary, and largely worthless account of the Apostolic Age. If their opinion is correct, they ought to have little difficulty in proving its correctness beyond dispute. For no history offers more abundant opportunities to test its accuracy than does the Book of Acts. Consider the variety of scene and circumstance with which the author had to deal. As Rackham in his recent commentary points out, “The ground covered reached from Jerusalem to Rome, taking in Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and Italy. In that field were comprised all manner of populations, civilizations, administrations, — Jewish and Oriental life, Western civilization, great capitals like Antioch and Ephesus, Roman colonies, independent towns, Greek cities,



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barbarian country districts. The history covers a period of thirty years which witnessed in many parts great political changes. Provinces like Cyprus and Achaia were being exchanged between the emperor and the senate; parts of Asia Minor, *e. g.* Pisidia and Lycaonia, were undergoing a process of annexation and Latinization; Judea itself was now a Roman province under a procurator, now an independent state under an Herodian king." If Acts was written long after the events it describes, and by an author who drew mainly upon his imagination for his facts, it could not fail to reveal this by evident inaccuracies and anachronisms. No writer of the second century, dealing with so wide and varied a field, could avoid them; and our present abundant knowledge of the field, gained from contemporary literature and constant discovery of monumental remains, would make his blunders increasingly manifest. That the book has stood the test triumphantly is the best proof of its credibility.

All recent discoveries have only confirmed our confidence in the accuracy of the statements in Acts. Take a single example out of many. Saul and Barnabas, on their first missionary journey, somewhere about 45--50 A. D., are said to have met in Cyprus the governor of the island, Sergius Paulus, who is called a proconsul. This governor is not



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mentioned in any history of Cyprus; and in the second century the island was an imperial province and therefore governed by a proprætor and not by a proconsul. But we learn from coins and inscriptions and one of the old historians that in the first century the island was under the senate and so had a proconsul. And some years ago Cesnola discovered an inscription in Cyprus, probably of the date 55 A. D., which mentions an event as having taken place a few years before "in the time of the proconsul Paulus." Evidently here we have the man who sought to hear the word of God from Barnabas and Saul. Dr. Ramsay, who has done much in Asia Minor and elsewhere to trace the early history of Christianity in the light of archæological evidence, says that he himself began the study of Acts with a strong prejudice against its credibility, and with the belief that the Tübingen theory, *viz.* that it is a late piece of historical fiction, was correct; but his investigations have convinced him that for accuracy of statement, grasp of his subject, and ability to set it forth in the clearest way, the author of Acts is an historian of the very first rank, the equal of Thucydides. Such a conclusion carries with it more than the credibility of Acts; it greatly increases our confidence in the Gospel of Luke. For all critics agree that the man who wrote Acts was

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also the writer of the Third Gospel; everything about the two books,—their language, style, manner of treating a topic, as well as the common dedication to Theophilus,—indicates this. And if the author of Acts is an historian of such accuracy and ability, we may rest assured that in his life of Jesus we have a work deserving our highest confidence.

The question still remains unsettled as to how far the writer of Acts made use of earlier documents in preparing his book. It seems probable that for the first part of the work he may have had some sketch of the events it describes; the method he is supposed to have followed in writing the Gospel would strengthen this opinion. But to hold that the “we” passages in the latter part of the book (*i. e.* the passages in which he uses the first person plural in his narrative) are from a separate document instead of being the personal experiences of the author, is far more difficult. There is nothing in style or vocabulary to distinguish them from their context, and we may be sure that a writer of such literary ability would not have inserted them without obviating the awkward change of persons. There is little reason to doubt that the use of the first person was intentional, to denote those portions of the narrative where the author is speaking as an eyewitness; and this conclusion agrees with

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the fact that those portions are more minute and vivid in details than the rest. If, then, the writer was one of Paul's companions, it makes no great difference which one; but a process of elimination among them indicates Luke, "the beloved physician," and the knowledge displayed in the use of medical terms is said to confirm this early tradition. Nor is the date of the book of vital importance when the authorship has thus been settled. Some still hold that its abrupt termination proves it to have been written while Paul was at Rome in prison, and before the result of his appeal to Cæsar was known. Others believe that it was written later; and they explain its silence about Paul's last days as due either to Luke's intention to write a third book continuing the history, or to his belief that when he had brought the Apostle to the central city of the world he had finished the record which was suggested by Acts 1:8, or to the necessity for silence concerning the later hostility of Rome towards the Christians. Various dates, therefore, are suggested for the composition of the book, ranging all the way from about 60 A. D. to near the close of the century. In deciding upon a date we have to bear in mind that the Gospel of Luke was written before, but probably not long before, the Book of Acts.

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### XI.

THE Epistles of Paul, as is well known, have been the subject of a long and bitter controversy. About the middle of the last century the Tübingen School declared with great positiveness that only four of them, *viz.* Galatians, I. and II. Corinthians, and Romans, could be accepted as genuine; and it proceeded to reconstruct the life of Paul and all the early church history upon this basis. From that time until the present the arguments for and against Paul's authorship have been hotly discussed. With the exception of one small group of critics, who must be described separately, scholars have finally abandoned the Tübingen position, and have come to a practically unanimous acceptance of the genuineness of all except the Pastoral Epistles. There is still some dispute concerning Ephesians and II. Thessalonians; but if Colossians and I. Thessalonians are recognized as genuine, there seems no good reason why these two, which so closely resemble them, should be rejected.

A new theory concerning Galatians has been stoutly advocated by Ramsay, and has met with considerable favor, *viz.* that this epistle instead of being addressed to churches in the centre of Asia Minor, about whose founding we know practically

## *The Pauline Epistles*

nothing, was addressed to the churches of Antioch, Iconium and other cities visited by Paul in his first missionary journey. This is called the South Galatian theory, and is based on the fact that while Galatia Proper was simply the region in central Asia Minor, the Roman Province of Galatia in Paul's day included these southern cities, so that Christians in them might properly be called Galatians. If the theory is adopted, we may consider the Epistle as possibly the very first of Paul's extant writings, and we must shape our conception of its readers and of the circumstances that called it forth by what we know of the history of these southern churches; but this will not materially change our interpretation of its contents. Another question still unsettled is whether Philippians should be reckoned the earliest or the latest of the four epistles written by Paul from Rome during his captivity. This, too, is of no great importance except as it affects our conception of the progress of events in that captivity. Generally the arrangement of the epistles according to the order in which they were written has not been changed from the one with which we are familiar, *viz.* I. and II. Thess., Gal., I. and II. Cor., Rom., Col., Phile., Eph., and Phil. The exact date of each epistle cannot be determined because the chronology of the Apostolic Age is yet, and probably always will be, un-

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settled. The recent tendency is to push back a little the time of Paul's arrival in Rome, placing it before the year 60 A. D. instead of after, and to assign correspondingly earlier dates to his epistles.

The Pastoral Epistles remain a subject of dispute. The chief arguments against their genuineness are the difficulty of fitting them into any scheme of Paul's life, their difference in style and tone from the rest of his letters, and the developed condition of church government and thought they indicate. Many scholars pronounce them spurious. Others would explain them as enlargements of brief notes written by Paul on different occasions before he went to Rome, — these notes having been worked over and adapted to the later condition of the church by some unknown writer. Others are still holding the old view that they are genuine, and were written after Paul's release from the first Roman imprisonment. The objections to their genuineness are answered by pointing out that we know too little about Paul's last days to affirm there was no opportunity for him to write them, that letters of this kind and written at some interval after the others might be expected to differ from the rest, and that church government and life may have developed more rapidly than we suppose, or more rapidly in one place than in another. The adoption of the earlier dates for other events in

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Paul's life allows more time for these last letters, and thus strengthens the argument for their genuineness. But if the argument is not wholly satisfactory, we need not be greatly distressed; for those who deny Paul's authorship are ready to recognize the historical importance of the Pastoral Epistles as early church documents, and also their great spiritual value which justly entitles them to a place in the New Testament.

In the statement that the Tübingen position was universally abandoned, exception was made of one small group of critics who just at the present moment are exciting attention. This may be called the Dutch school, though it has representatives in Germany and America; and its position can be learned from the articles on Paul and Romans by van Manen in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. It asserts that no one of Paul's letters, — not even the four which have been universally accepted as genuine, — was written by him, that they are not letters at all but treatises composed in the form of letters long after Paul's death, and that the doctrines they set forth did not originate until after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D. The Epistle to the Romans, for example, is a compilation of heterogeneous material, made in the first half of the second century; and the only reason why it has been accepted as genuine is because



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no one has ever thought to examine carefully its credentials. Concerning the real Paul the Dutch school says we know very little, for legend has been busy with his history and the account in Acts is largely worthless. Apparently his ideas were the same as those of his fellow Apostles, and his Christianity was of the prevalent Jewish type. Paulinism, as we find it in the epistles, arose among so-called heretics, and the epistles were first regarded as sacred writings by the Gnostics. This Dutch school is evidently even more revolutionary than the Tübingen school; in fact, it criticizes that school for stopping midway in the work of destruction. How much influence it is going to have, time alone can show. Probably such sweeping denial of all the facts that sober scholarship regards as most fully established, will be treated as one of the wild vagaries which appear from time to time and are of no importance except as they bring the Higher Criticism into disrepute. But possibly it will have to be reckoned with seriously, and may give the impulse to a new investigation of the whole question of Paul's relation to the epistles that bear his name. Judging from the past we need not be doubtful about the results of such investigation.



## *The Epistle to the Hebrews*

### XII.

THE authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews remains the enigma it has been for seventeen hundred years. As far back as the close of the second century Clement and Origen and Tertullian were discussing it, and were agreed only upon the fact that Paul was not the author. Clement thought that Luke wrote Hebrews under Paul's direction. Tertullian was confident that its author was Barnabas. While Origen expressed what has been the general opinion ever since, "Who wrote the epistle, in truth, God knows." Luther, as is well known, ventured the plausible conjecture that it was the work of Apollos, the Alexandrian Jew, "mighty in the Scriptures." And Harnack has recently put forth the still more fascinating guess that the author was none other than that able, independent, and most energetic woman, Priscilla. This ought to meet with much favor in certain circles where Paul's injunction that women should not teach but are to learn from their husbands at home, has been a standing grievance. When discussion waxes hot over the authorship of some other book in the New Testament, it is well for us to bear in mind that here is one whose place in the sacred list remains secure though its author is confessedly

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altogether unknown. The destination of the book is as obscure as its source. It was evidently written to some particular church; and those who are fond of paradoxes like to maintain that the church was made up of Gentiles and not of Hebrews. They would suggest some church in Italy, and that the salutation with which the epistle closes, "They of Italy salute you," was from its absent members to their friends at home. But certainly the whole argument of the book, *viz.* that Christianity is the glorious consummation of the Old Testament revelation, and that those who turn back from it to Judaism forsake the better for the worse, — presupposes that the readers have once accepted the Jewish religion, and are still susceptible to its attractions. Even to-day a person who is not familiar with the Old Testament and acquainted with the temple ceremonies, finds much of Hebrews uninteresting and unprofitable, — which is probably the reason why it is not more read. The date of the book depends somewhat upon its destination. If the epistle was to some church in Palestine, though outside of Jerusalem (Bartlet suggests Cæsarea), a date in the decade before the destruction of Jerusalem would be most probable, for just at that time the enthusiasm aroused by the completion of Herod's temple after its many years of building, the outburst of patriotism which led up

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to the final revolt of the Jews, and the increasing recognition that Christianity could not be reckoned as merely one form of the Jewish religion, combined to make many Jewish Christians dissatisfied with their new faith and disposed to resume the old.

### XIII.

THE Catholic Epistles have ever been much more a matter of uncertainty than the Pauline Epistles. Of the seven books whose right to a place in the New Testament was long questioned, five were Catholic Epistles, *viz.* James, because there were doubts about its genuineness, and it seemed to contradict Paul as to the relation of faith and works; II. Peter and Jude, because one of the two was evidently a plagiarism of the other, and both contained matters perplexing to Christian thought; and II. and III. John, because they were so insignificant, and it was not evident that "the elder" who wrote them was John. The other two books that were questioned were Hebrews, because its authorship was unknown, and Revelation, because no one could understand it then any better than now, and fanatics used it, — as they have ever since, — in support of their teachings.

The present discussion concerning James is

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whether it was one of the earliest books of the New Testament, written before Paul's doctrine of faith and works had come to the front, or one of the very latest, written after that doctrine had lost its prominence. For critics generally agree that in James the emphasis of works rather than faith is not directed against Paul's doctrine, and shows that the writer did not have that doctrine in mind. Many German scholars would date the book at the end of the first century or even well down in the second; and the theory has been advanced that it originally was a Jewish writing which afterwards was transformed into a Christian epistle by the insertion of a few Christian phrases. But most English scholars hold that it was written by the brother of our Lord, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, who was put to death about 62 A. D., and that it is perhaps the earliest Christian document we possess. As such it is a remarkably interesting epistle, revealing the simple, practical faith of the first Christians in days before theological development had begun. It is strongly an echo of the Sermon on the Mount, and gives us a fuller reproduction of the ethical teachings of Jesus than can be found in all the other epistles. It is written in excellent Greek with a cultured choice of words; it abounds in illustrations and in what might be called germs of parables; "and a vein of poetry

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pervades it, so that it may almost be called a prose poem" (Gloag). If the author was the brother of Jesus, it casts a sidelight on the training and thought of the home in Nazareth, which might be utilized more fully in a study of the boyhood of Jesus. Its message is a general one to Jewish Christians outside of Palestine, encouraging them in their trials, and warning them against the special sins into which Jews are most liable to fall.

The evidence that I. Peter was written by the Apostle is strong, and the majority of scholars accept the epistle as genuine. Whether a Galilean fisherman, taken from his boats in middle life, would possess the literary skill it displays, may be doubted; but nothing was easier than for Peter to make use of one of his friends in the labor of composition. The statement, "By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I account him, I have written unto you briefly" (5:12), may indicate that it was Silas, the well-known companion of Paul, who acted as amanuensis. That the epistle has a Pauline tone is an argument for rather than against its genuineness, if Peter had been much with Paul at the time when he wrote. For Peter was of an impressionable temperament, and readily adopted the ideas of his associates. Nor are we surprised to find in his book echoes of the Epistle of James and Romans and Ephesians. In Jerusalem he had

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been intimate with James, and doubtless knew his epistle. And at Rome, where tradition says Peter spent his last days, Paul's letter to the church in Rome and his letter from Rome to the Ephesians might be found and would deeply impress Peter. There seems to be little doubt that the epistle was written from Rome, for which Babylon (5:13) would be the mystic name; but whether "she that is in Babylon," who sends her salutations, along with those of Mark, was the Roman church or was Peter's wife who, as we know, used to accompany him on his missionary tours, must remain a matter of individual opinion. The date we give to the epistle will depend upon whether we accept the strong tradition that Peter died as a martyr in Rome under Nero. He was writing to cheer the Christians of Asia Minor who were beginning to suffer persecution by the Roman government; and Ramsay thinks that the governmental persecution of Christians simply because they were Christians did not arise until the days of Vespasian, so that Peter must have lived until that time and have written about 80 A. D. Such prolongation of his life would harmonize with another ancient tradition that he was for twenty-five years at the head of the church in Rome; for it is difficult to believe that he reached Rome before Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans, say 54 A. D. . But unless Peter

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was a much younger man than we suppose when he became a disciple, he would be decrepit with age by the time of Vespasian. Ramsay's opinion about governmental persecution is not generally adopted, and the date of the epistle is usually put somewhere between 60 and 68 A. D.

Jude and II. Peter are epistles that must be studied together; for the writer of one certainly made use of the other. But which is the earlier? Is Jude an abridgment of a part of II. Peter, or is II. Peter an amplification of Jude with independent additions? The problem is not an easy one, but the indications are that Jude is the earlier book. It is brief, strong, and symmetrical, and to enlarge and dilute it would be an easy task; but to condense II. Peter, retaining the unusual words, bringing together the scattered ideas, adding quotations from apocalyptical books, and making the result an harmonious whole, would require great literary skill. Moreover, why should a writer who was abridging II. Peter, make use of only the central part of the book, if the whole of it was before him? Still the argument is not conclusive, and the latest commentator, Biggs, believes that Jude is the later of the two books. The peculiar character of Jude, its quotation from the Book of Enoch as from sacred Scripture, its account of the dispute between the archangel Michael and the devil over the body



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of Moses, its statement that angels fell into the fleshly sins for which Sodom was infamous, and were cast down to hell and kept in chains, — all this justifies the doubts which have existed from the early centuries, as to whether the book ought to have a place in the New Testament. If the author was the brother of James (and there seems no good reason why a forger should ascribe his work to such an obscure person), his epistle stands in marked contrast to that of James, not only in its ideas but even in its language; and we must conclude that the two brothers had very little in common.

Such perplexities about Jude increase the difficulties about II. Peter. In some ways it strongly resembles I. Peter; in other ways it differs just as strongly. Many of even the conservative scholars deny its genuineness; yet the first chapter is full of allusions to the Transfiguration that seem like the almost unconscious reminiscences of an eyewitness. If the writer made use of Jude, it is still less likely that he was Peter, for Jude speaks of the Apostles as if they had already passed away. Moreover, in the closing chapter of II. Peter the epistles of Paul are discussed as if a collection of them was then well known; but men would hardly make such a collection until Paul himself was dead, and they had begun to treasure up the writings he left behind



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him. Yet if Peter survived Paul for many years, as Ramsay thinks, he may have been acquainted with such a collection. Thus we can heap up arguments on either side concerning the genuineness of the epistle. An ingenious solution of the difficulties supposes that Peter wrote a brief letter encouraging those Christians who were beginning to despair of Christ's second coming. In this letter, which forms practically the first chapter and the close of the last chapter of II. Peter, he promised (1:12--15) to stir his readers up from time to time by putting them in remembrance. A later writer, noting this promise and thinking that Jude was such a message as Peter would then give if still alive and aware of existing circumstances, took the letter of Peter and incorporated Jude in it, with such changes and additions as would make the whole seem more like original words of the Apostle, and published the result as II. Peter. But this is merely conjecture. The problems of the two epistles are still unsolved, and the books remain "the most doubtful writings in the New Testament."

The strong resemblance in thought and style and vocabulary between I. John and the fourth Gospel leads most scholars to believe that they were by the same author. Whether that author was the Apostle John is a matter of more dispute. If the epistle stood alone, its genuineness might not be questioned.

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But the unwillingness of many to admit that the Gospel with its clear revelation of the divinity of Jesus is the trustworthy record of the Apostle who knew Him most intimately, keeps the discussion ever open. The arguments are gone over again and again. It is pointed out that Irenæus, the pupil of Polycarp, who in turn was the pupil of John himself, declares positively John wrote the Gospel, and that the long-lost but recently discovered Diatessaron of Tatian, — a combination of the four Gospels made about 170 A. D., — shows that the Gospel of John in the time of Irenæus had precisely the form in which we have it to-day, and received from the church the same recognition as the Synoptics. It is also shown by a careful examination of the book itself that it must have been written by an eye-witness who was one of the original Apostles, and more precisely the Apostle John. But all this and much more of evidence, external and internal, is explained away and rejected by those who are not disposed to accept it, — even as any evidence can be, unless it is absolutely overwhelming. Those who deny the Johannine authorship have nothing simple and definite to give us in its place. They agree that the Gospel must have been written not long after the death of John, and contains much that probably was learned from him; but who wrote it, and how it gained immediate acceptance

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as the work of John, are questions that they answer with long and labored hypotheses. To hold that John was really the author is to adopt the simple and natural explanation of the obvious facts. And if John wrote the Gospel, we may also attribute to him the epistle. There is little to indicate the time and place of its composition; but we may readily accept the old tradition that it was written by John at Ephesus in the closing years of his life. The epistle seems to be neither a personal letter nor a treatise, but a pastoral addressed by the Apostle to all his churches, warning them against prevalent misconceptions of the Incarnation, and exhorting them to brotherly love and Christian obedience. Farrar suggests that it was meant to accompany the Gospel of John as an appendix and a practical commentary upon it; certainly, apart from the Gospel, or from teachings similar to those in the Gospel, "neither the prologue nor other parts of the Epistle could have been easily understood."

The two little epistles, II. and III. John, are not important enough to arouse much discussion. They resemble the first epistle sufficiently to justify our belief that the author was the same. Whether II. John was written to a church or to a lady, whose name may have been Electa or Kyria or even Electa Kyria, is one of those interesting questions that

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must remain unanswered. Both epistles are charming little personal notes; and the one to Gaius is specially valuable for the ray of light it casts upon church life at the close of the Apostolic Age.

### XIV.

THE Revelation of John was ascribed without question to the Apostle by men of the second century who had abundant opportunity to know its authorship. But in the third century scholars pointed out that it could not be by the same writer as the Gospel and epistles, because it differed from them so greatly in language, style, and spirit. These higher critics of an early day wished to disprove its genuineness in order that the millenarians might not use it to support their gross doctrines; but in recent times the same arguments are often used by those who grant that Revelation is genuine, and then argue that the other writings ascribed to John must be spurious. Various explanations of the difference between John's writings, supposing them all to be genuine, have been suggested. In composing Revelation he may purposely have adopted the language and style of other apocalyptic books; or if he wrote the Gospel and epistles in extreme old age, the main labor of com-

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position may have been performed by one of his disciples. If we suppose that Revelation was written many years before the others, we may believe that in the interval John had not only gained a more perfect mastery of Greek (the style and grammar of Revelation are the worst in the New Testament), but had also succeeded in the more difficult task of mastering his own spirit, and developing that forbearance and love to all men which are so conspicuous in the epistles and so lacking in Revelation. Renan and Farrar were confident that the book was written about 69 A. D., and thus antedated by nearly thirty years John's other writings; but recent opinion places its composition in the age of Domitian, and thus does away with the possibility of any such change in John. A new theory, which is gaining some acceptance, denies the integrity of the book, and holds that it was made up of smaller Jewish and Christian apocalypses of various dates. These apocalypses are supposed to have been already in circulation in the church, and to have been woven together very skilfully into one great apocalypse about the end of the century, either by John or by some unknown writer. The advocates of this theory are applying themselves with much enthusiasm to the work of dissecting the book and determining the origin of its component parts. All we can say at present is that they have

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undertaken no easy task, and that until they agree among themselves as to results we are not called upon to accept or reject their theory.

Concerning the interpretation of Revelation, Robert South once said emphatically, "The more it is studied, the less it is understood, as generally either finding a man cracked or leaving him so." The works upon it form a huge monument of wasted time and strength. The book has been explained as a picture of events still to come at the end of the world, or as a veiled history of the church down through the ages wherein one may discover the Pope and the Turks and Napoleon Bonaparte and almost any of his pet aversions, or as a symbolic account of the author's own day, or as a description of the good and evil principles that are ever warring against each other in the progress of the Kingdom of God. A few years ago we seemed to be settling down to the opinion that its pictures should be interpreted by events under Nero, and that it gave us especially a weird but minutely accurate representation of the troublous times in Palestine just before the fall of Jerusalem. But now, with the inclination to change the date or deny the integrity of the book, this opinion is being placed among the obsolete ones. Such has been the history of all interpretations as far back as the days of Jerome,

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who said of Revelation, "*Tot verba, tot mysteria.*"

It is possible, however, that a clearer understanding of Revelation may yet be reached. The book is by no means unique in character. It is an apocalypse, — a favorite form of composition from the time when Daniel was written till long after the Apostolic Age. There were many apocalypses current in Christ's day, and they did much to shape the popular conception of what the Messiah would be and do. Some of these have long been known, and others have recently been discovered. Scholars are rousing to a more careful study of apocalyptic literature. How does apocalypse differ from prophecy? What are the rules for its interpretation? What circumstances call it forth? What message does its writer usually wish to convey? An answer to these and similar questions is now possible since we have so many apocalypses to study; and it will help us greatly in understanding both the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation. Enough has already been done in this line to warrant the statement that neither Daniel nor Revelation was intended to throw light upon the end of the world or the future history of the church or any such similar object concerning which they have been eagerly searched. They had a message of cheer and comfort for the men of the age in which they



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were written, — a message given in a form that seems to us strange and obscure, but which doubtless was understood by their immediate readers. But that message was not for us, except as we stand in need of similar cheer and comfort, and it was not prophecy in the sense of prediction of far-off events.

### XV.

AND now, — to quote words that originally came from a preacher but are more often uttered by an afflicted congregation, — “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.” The present state of New Testament criticism is decidedly encouraging. That the New Testament should be forced to pass through the fire of critical study was inevitable. The past century was an age of historical criticism, demanding that every document should undergo minute and searching investigation before it was accepted as an authority. In such an age, — no matter how great the reverence for the New Testament, — its documents could not escape that investigation. Nor was it desirable that they should; for otherwise we should ever have been haunted by the suspicion that they were not truly reliable. In the beginning of the investigation many students were confident that this suspicion would be proved



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correct; and for a time there were indications that they were right. But, as our survey of the field has shown, the opposite has been the result. The New Testament text which is offered us to-day is proved to be so near to that of the original autographs that we can use it with the utmost confidence as giving practically the words of the writers. This fact in itself overthrows the opinion that certain passages, especially in the Gospels, were later insertions. If they are to be found in all the various sources from which we gain the text, no personal opinion about their credibility and genuineness can avail against this evidence. As Headlam points out, "Textual criticism has probably already eliminated every verse and passage which were not parts of the original text. The attempts which have been made to mix up the Lower and the Higher Criticism have almost invariably failed" (*Criticism of the N. T.* 168). And with the exception of a few comparatively unimportant books, concerning which there were serious doubts as far back as when the Canon was being formed, the Higher Criticism has not shaken our confidence in the trustworthiness of the New Testament. Hostile attacks still continue to be made, — and undoubtedly will for generations to come; but they create far less alarm and make far less impression than half a century ago. As one of the most recent

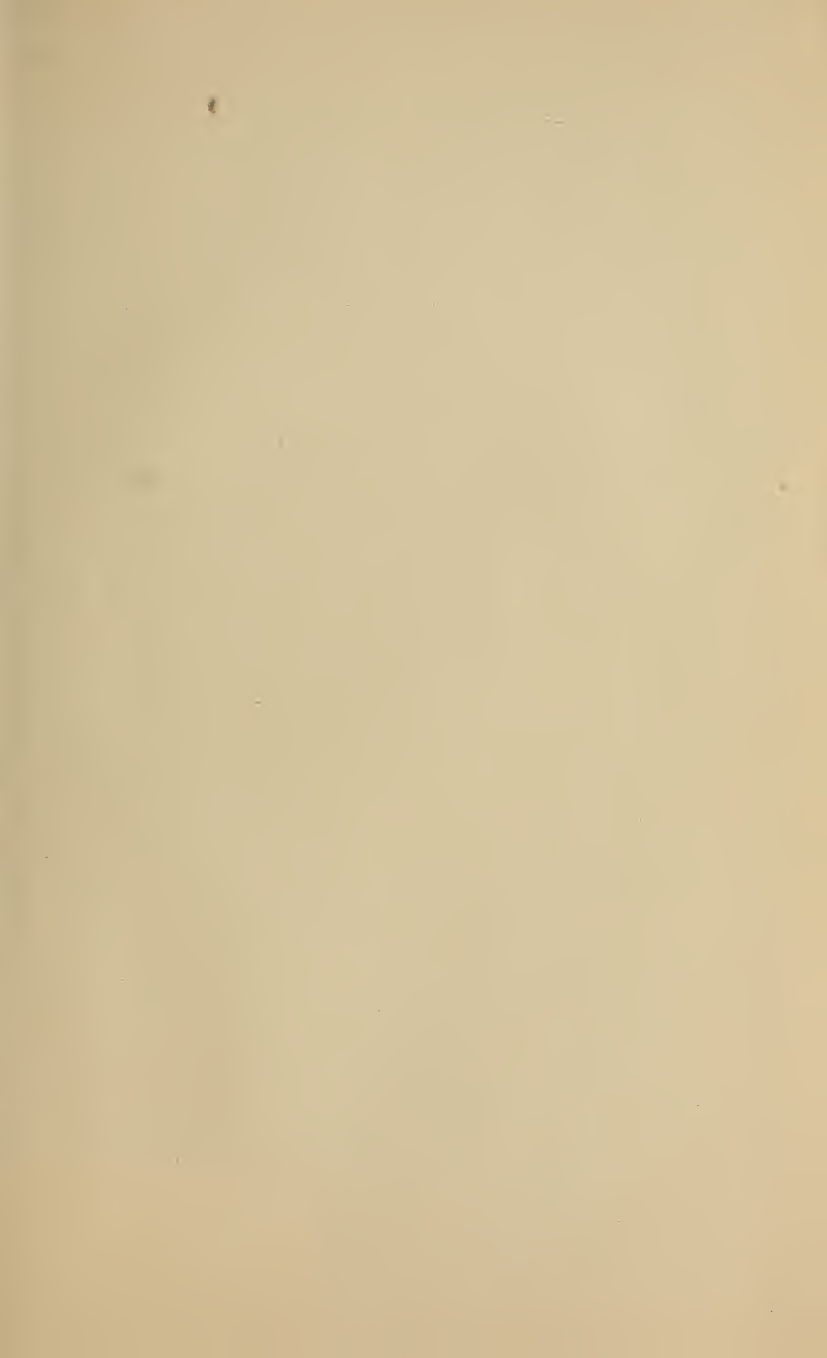
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writers upon the subject says, "The result of the enquiry, as far as it has proceeded, has been to show that as witnesses for the life of Christ and the life and thought of the early church the New Testament writings need fear no criticism. Criticism has reasserted their value, and has shown that when subjected to the severest tests of modern science, they are found to be historical documents of first-rate importance. It has made it possible for Christian men to continue to believe in the historical value of the New Testament with an unsullied conscience. . . . For the professed historian general agreement as to date and historical value is only the prelude to a searching enquiry into the more subtle and finer questions which every book will suggest to him. For the ordinary Christian these have no meaning. Secure in the belief that he is dealing with books that are in the main what they profess to be, he reads them just as he reads any ancient documents, with a healthy disregard of the minuter details of criticism, which he regards as necessary subjects of enquiry for experts, but as of little value for himself" (*Contentio Veritatis*, 230, 232).

THE END.







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